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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

12 October 1955

INTERNAL DISTRIBUTION

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 78-55

SUBJECT: Preliminary Views on Molotov's Self-Criticism

1. The "significance" of Molotov's public confession cannot yet be assessed. The Kommunist editorial which accompanied Molotov's letter of self-criticism, and presumably amplified and interpreted it, is not yet available for study. Press analyses have placed particular stress on this editorial, and our views must remain tentative until a careful study of this document is made. In the meantime, an analysis of Molotov's letter itself, and a critical look at some of the interpretations which have already been suggested, may be useful.

2. In his letter which was published in Kommunist on Oct. 8, Molotov accused himself of having used a "theoretically mistaken and politically harmful" formula in describing the stage which the USSR had reached in its progress towards Communism. He recalled that in his report to the Supreme Soviet on 8 February, he had said: "together with the Soviet Union, where the foundations of a Socialist Society have already been built, there are also those people's democratic countries which have taken only the first but very important steps in the direction of socialism." This mistaken formula, he explained, "leads to incorrect deductions that allegedly a Socialist society has still not been built in the USSR, that only the foundations of a Socialist society have been built." He then went on to point out party decisions which had given the correct line and had allegedly conflicted with his own formulation.

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3. Since the 1930's public confession has been used in the Soviet Union to bring about the disgrace and elimination of individuals, to affirm party policy, and to signal the closing of debate on a question at issue. Interpretations of the Molotov affair have depended, by analogy, upon these Soviet precedents and usages. In general, they have tended to follow one or more of the following lines:

- a. Molotov's confession of ideological error is intended to provide a pretext for his removal or retirement from the ruling group. Over the past several months, and particularly since the Soviet publication of Tito's attack on Molotov's 8 February speech, there have been a series of indications that Molotov's grasp was slipping and that his dismissal was imminent. The obscurity of the ideological issues involved also suggests that it is used only as a pretext.
 - b. The confession is essentially an affirmation of the present line of Soviet foreign policy and is intended as a warning to those who, presumably like Molotov, were dragging their feet. This interpretation rests largely upon the evidence of the Kommunist editorial, which warned against excessive dogmatism, and boasted of the present success of the party in daringly combining adherence to principle with flexibility in foreign policy. It also rests upon the judgment that the choice of Molotov's 8 February speech for criticism was intended to convey the impression that the tough line of that speech had been repudiated by the present leadership.
 - c. In addition to the above, the confession is intended in particular to affirm the correctness of the "Khrushchev-Bulganin" line toward Yugoslavia. This interpretation is suggested by the declaration in the Kommunist editorial that Communists must "combine respect for all that concerns the basic questions of Marxist-Leninist principles...with the greatest respect and tact in relation to the national feelings of peoples." The fact that the quotation at issue is concerned precisely with the Soviet-Satellite relationship, together with the fact that Molotov has been identified prominently with an anti-Tito policy, also suggests that the Yugoslav question may have been involved.
4. Our preliminary view is that these suggested interpretations probably all contain part of the truth, and are generally compatible

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with one another. We are less inclined to alternative (a) than to (b) and (c), mostly because this first interpretation is insufficient as an explanation for Molotov's disgrace. Since Molotov's removal could almost certainly have been carried off without his prior disgrace, this measure must have had another and broader purpose. The choice of Molotov as penitent almost certainly is intended to convey the message that the policies with which he has been indentified in the past have now been discarded by the Soviet leaders.

5. Close attention to theoretical writings during the next few months may throw further light on this question, and may even reveal that policy questions of fundamental and long-term importance are involved. A resolution of the XIXth Party Congress provided that a revision of the party program, which had not been modified since 1919, should be undertaken and presented to the next Congress which is to meet in February, 1956. The failure of the July Plenum to mention the revision may indicate that policy differences have prevented the drafting committee from completing this task. It is possible that Molotov's ideological confession is connected with disputes over the party program, and that consequently it touches upon fundamental Soviet assessments of their opportunities and objectives during the present historical stage.

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